

# Conferences/Meetings/Workshops hosted, organised or attended

## 4TH GARDEN ROUTE INTERFACE AND NETWORKING (GRIN) MEETING

Jessica Hayes

Following a two year Covid-related break, it was with much excitement that the 4th Garden Route Interface and Networking (GRIN) Meeting convened at Pine Lake Marina outside Sedgefield from 11 to 13 October 2022. GRIN provides a space for researchers, managers, policymakers and practitioners from around the world to share experiences, approaches and insights related to the management, research and sustainability of social-ecological systems. Examples of these systems are protected areas, working landscapes, estuaries and catchments. GRIN aims to promote a diversity of perspectives and robust discussion, focusing not only on the latest research, but particularly placing a high value on practitioner experience and knowledge and practitioner-scientist engagement.

laboration; intricacies of managing protected areas as social-ecological systems; landscape-scale challenges and management/governance strategies; transformative research and societal adaptations; and monitoring and evaluation in a complex world.

The 2022 meeting was arguably the highlight of GRIN in its short history, with participant feedback being particularly complimentary about the quality and diversity of presentations, deep conversations, ability to engage with and learn from managers, and the opportunity to socialise and network on a field excursion. The following quotes from feedback provided by delegates reflect the general spirit of GRIN 2022:

GRIN 2022, jointly organised and hosted by SANParks, Nelson Mandela University, the Southern African Program on Ecosystem Change and Society (SAPECS) and the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), was attended by 75 delegates. Key discussion themes centred on people-nature connections, nature tourism and cultural heritage; experiences and lessons of stakeholder co-learning, knowledge sharing and col-

*"I have found myself in a pool of scientist network that has changed my perspectives about research forever" (Student X)*  
*"The workshop was an eye opener for me" (Manager Y)*  
*"Hearing progressive voices in conservation agencies – how do we amplify those voices?" (Scientist Z)*



## SAVANNA SCIENCE NETWORKING MEETING - 20 YEAR CELEBRATION!

Judith Botha & Izak Smit



The idea behind what was to become the International Savanna Science Networking Meeting was conceptualised in the early 2000s after a small group of scientists met at Shingwedzi camp in the Kruger National Park to discuss issues related to rivers. The meeting has gone from strength to strength and during March 2023, the 20th SSNM was celebrated with 210 delegates attending this milestone meeting in Skukuza. We reflect on the past 20 years, mainly focusing on the meetings from 2008 until 2023 for which the annual delegate database was meticulously kept. During this period we had 1321 unique delegates attending, most of which (n = 790) attended only one meeting, often as postgraduate students presenting their research. Continuity and the sense of community that developed over the years are illustrated by the 117 delegates that have attended five or more meetings over this period, including four SANParks delegates who attended all fifteen and three non-SANParks delegates who attended fourteen past meetings.

Since 2008, we have had 341 unique institutions represented at the meeting, with 84 institutions represented in 2023, the highest number ever recorded. Although many delegates are from SANParks and South African Universities, there is usually also a large international attendance (from between 16-19 countries). Delegates from 35 countries have attended since 2008 and we now have roughly a 50:50 split between local and international attendance.

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Over the years, the meeting has grown to become a successful, well-organised and sought-after international savanna conference. It takes place in a modern auditorium with live-streaming, yet still retains much of its earlier character and "local flavour". Importantly, it remains true to its name - a place to network. The meeting is as much about sharing results from studies, as it is about conceptualising new ideas and forging new collaborations. Over time, the meeting has broadened its focus from pure ecological science, and for several years now, has included presenters and expertise across different domains, including the social sciences.

We trust that the meeting will continue to play an important role as a catalyst for both local and international collaborative research and the sharing of research results in a co-learning space. SANParks Scientific Services are truly proud of hosting this meeting each year and look forward to the next 20 years!